Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the proposal of notifying as a tiger reserve: arguments for and against; about NTCA

News: The Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS), though home to more than half the number of tigers present in Kerala, may not be notified as a tiger reserve as the proposal lacks public support.

Background
The ‘Status of Tigers in India’ report released in 2019 had estimated the tiger population of Wayanad as between 75 and 80 individuals. Periyar Tiger Reserve, the first one in Kerala, has an estimated population of 30 to 35 big cats, whereas Parambikulam, the second reserve, has a population of 20 to 25 tigers.

Proposal rejected

- The attempts of the Kerala Forest Department to push forward the proposal for notifying the sanctuary as the third tiger reserve in the State came a cropper at the recently held State Wildlife Advisory Board. Citing the public resistance against the earlier attempts, the board rejected the proposal.

- Piloting the Wayanad proposal, the department officials pointed out that more than half of the tiger population in the State was found in Wayanad. There were five tiger reserves in the neighbouring States that share boundaries with Wayanad.

Arguements put foward in favour of the proposal
The arguments of the officials that the notification would ensure financial aid from the Centre and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), better conservation and management of the tiger population and help generate more employment opportunities failed to impress the State authorities.
**Arguement against the proposal**

- Kerala Chief Minister, who chaired the meeting, flagged the issue of human-wildlife conflicts in the district. Referring to the public protests that were staged in Wayanad earlier against the proposal, the CM expressed concern over the possible impact of the proposal. Any such proposal should be implemented only after holding wide public consultations.

- Cattle lifting by the ailing tigers and their straying into human habitations had often triggered widespread public protests in the district. The department had to backtrack from its earlier attempts to notify the reserve following stiff public resistance.

- There were speculations that the notification would bring in stringent restrictions on development activities in the district, though the department tried to counter the campaign.

**Support from NTCA**

- Each year, the NTCA supports the tiger reserves by funding the proposals put forward through its Annual Plan of Operations. The authority also supports the reserves for implementing the tiger conservation plan.

- While Periyar Tiger Reserve gets an annual support of around Rs. 9 crore, the Parambikulam TR gets around Rs.6 crore from the authority.